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ABSTRACT

Addressing the need to develop an evaluation system that assesses the effectiveness of a writing program on students' performance, the Holistic Writing Assessment Program of Mosley High School (Florida) was devised to ascertain and document the extent to which improvement occurred in students' compositions. On a designated day in the semester, all students wrote an essay on an assigned topic (1,112 usable pieces of writing were collected). A committee of three English teachers then read and randomly selected some compositions as "anchor papers" to define six scoring categories from best to worst. These papers were used along with a rubric (general descriptions of each category) to guide the scoring of the remaining compositions. Other English teachers were trained in the scoring process, and under the supervision of the committee members, scored the papers holistically. At Mosley, writing ability was shown to improve every year, with a clear differentiation in the writings of the ability-based tracks (accelerated, regular, and basic). The results of the writing evaluation were used in making decisions regarding curriculum, instructional materials, placement of students, and assignment of personnel. Recommendations included giving increased attention to the writing curriculum of accelerated students, and experimenting to determine the optimum mixture of curriculum components (literature, grammar and mechanics, vocabulary, and composition). (Ten tables of data are included, and references and directions sheets for teachers and students are appended.) (MM)

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The Holistic Writing Assessment Program

Of Mosley High School

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The Holistic Writing Assessment Program

Of Mosley High School

Part One: The Plan

I. The Reasons for Evaluation

During the last fifteen years there has been a growing awareness among educators and the general public that many students graduate from high school with poorly developed skills in written composition. The problem was first identified by college English teachers in the late 1960's and early 1970's when they discovered an alarming increase in the number of entering freshmen who required remedial instruction in composition, and the problem received its first major national exposure when the December 8, 1975, issue of Newsweek carried a highly critical cover story entitled "Why Johnny Can't Write."

The "back to basics" movement was in part a response to the problem, but the first serious step in the United States toward solving the composition crisis was taken in 1981 when the Florida legislature passed and funded the Writing Skills Enhancement Program. For the first time in history, a major governing body recognized the unique needs of teachers of writing and committed substantial resources to meeting those needs. However, while the Writing Skills Enhancement Program provides the means and incentives for improvement in the teaching of writing, the issue of the measurement of improvement in student writing remains unexplored. In other words, the legislature wisely chose to spend state money in the direct support of instruction and left it to local schools to

develop evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of the program on students' performance.

This document is a description of a plan for such an evaluation system for Mosley High School. The plan is based on the beliefs that teachers have a right to know when good teaching is succeeding, that students have a right to know when hard work is paying off, and that parents and the general public have a right to know when tax dollars are being well spent. This plan is based on established practices in the field of writing evaluation, and the ideas and concepts have been borrowed from the publications listed in the bibliography. No attempt will be made to cite references except in the case of direct quotations.

II. Assumptions About the Evaluation of Writing

Writing is creative behavior of the highest sort to which an enormous number of factors contribute, and researchers and theorists are only beginning to probe the nature of the writing process. In 1963, Richard Braddock, et al. observed that "today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy: some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations" (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; p. 5). Unfortunately, the situation has not improved significantly in every area of writing instruction since 1963, but in the area of writing evaluation several assumptions have achieved widespread acceptance in the professional literature on the subject. Three of these

assumptions make up the theoretical undergirding of this plan.

Assumption A: The best way to assess a student's ability to write is to judge the merit of a sample of the student's writing.

Standardized objective tests are available which claim to measure achievement in writing by asking students to choose the best of several alternative wordings for phrases or sentences; by testing students' knowledge of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and other conventional aspects of writing; by having students identify errors in standard usage; and by asking direct cognitive questions about the writing process. Some of these tests are quite reliable and good as far as they go, but they all share a common set of weaknesses which make them inadequate as genuine measures of writing ability. This set of weaknesses includes assessing only a portion of all the skills required to write even a single sentence, assessing these skills in isolation from one another, and assessing the ability of students to apply these skills analytically rather than in the context of actual composition.

While the standardized objective tests of "writing skills" are often useful diagnostic tools for discrete aspects of writing, the only real test of writing ability is the finished product, the whole composition. In one sense, evaluation in writing is analogous to a test of a person's ability to swim. A swimming instructor may occasionally "test" a student's breathing, stroking, kicking, etc., for diagnostic purposes, but the only real mark of swimming capability is the ability to make it across the pool.

Assumption B: Growth in writing ability occurs slowly, and it can be adequately detected only over relatively long periods of time (such as a year).

Writing teachers routinely assign, evaluate, and grade a large number of compositions in a semester or year. However, in most cases writing assignments are made as culminating activities to a unit of instruction, and grades are more likely to be indications of how well the student has mastered the objectives of the unit than indications of overall writing ability. This is as it should be, but it creates the problem of obscuring growth in writing on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis.

In a sense, the measurement of growth in writing is similar to the measurement of human physical growth. A child's growth is imperceptible to parents from day to day, but the amount of growth is quite clear at a change of seasons when the child tries on last year's clothes. In much the same way, teachers, and especially students, have difficulty seeing growth in the heat of instruction, but the growth becomes readily apparent when one year's work is compared to another year's.

Assumption C: It is possible to obtain accurate and reliable information about the writing ability of students in a relatively simple procedure using holistic scoring techniques.

Holistic scoring procedures have been developed and refined over a period of several decades, and there is ample evidence to indicate that these procedures can be used quickly and with great accuracy. Holistic

scoring is routinely used by the College Entrance Examination Board in scoring the English composition test and advanced placement examinations, and it has also been used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Florida Department of Education.

III. The Objectives of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of the writing assessment system described in this plan is to ascertain and document the extent to which improvement in writing ability is taking place at Mosley. However, this overall purpose will be served by obtaining answers to the following questions during the first year of the assessment program.

1. Does improvement in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another across all course levels?
2. Does improvement in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another within each course level?
3. Is there differentiation in writing ability among course levels at the same grade?

In later years, after the Mosley English faculty has become familiar with the assessment procedures, additional questions will be added.

IV. Procedures for the Evaluation

Overview

During the second week of the second semester, one day in the

middle of the week will be designated "Writing Day." Care will be taken to schedule Writing Day to avoid conflicts with athletic events, holidays, and school activities which would distract from the evaluation process. Throughout the day students will write an essay on an assigned topic during their English classes, and these essays will take the place of one of the weekly writing assignments required by the Writing Skills Enhancement Program if the teacher so desires.

Selection of Topics

The utmost care will be taken to select topics which are general enough to allow flexibility in approach and content, and which are well defined enough to ensure that every student understands what is expected. In addition, the topics will require expository writing but will demand no specialized knowledge or background on the part of the student.

Evaluation Committee

A committee of three English teachers, including the department chairman, will supervise and coordinate the evaluation. This committee will perform the following functions:

1. Decide on the dates of Writing Day and a make-up day.
2. Select the topic for the essay.
3. Prepare directions for students and teachers.
4. Select anchor papers and develop the rubric for scoring the essays. (This will be discussed in detail later.)
5. Serve as Head Reader and Table Leaders for the scoring process.

Ensuring Anonymity

Research in the evaluation of writing clearly indicates the presence of a "halo effect" when teachers grade students' papers. In order to avoid this effect, students will not write their names on their papers. Instead, 3" x 5" index cards with a six-digit number in the upper right-hand corner will be prepared ahead of time. At the start of the evaluation session, these cards will be distributed randomly to students, and they will be asked to write their names, their grade and course level, and the date on the cards. The students will be instructed to write the number from the card on their papers, and the cards will be collected. The score from the evaluation will later be recorded on the card next to the date, and the cards will be kept on file. In subsequent years, the cards will be returned to students, and the same process will be followed. In this way the cards will serve as a permanent, cumulative record of each student's performance on the writing assessment.

The Scoring Process

The scoring process is the single most important aspect of this evaluation plan. When carried out carefully, this process yields results which have been found through research to be highly reliable.

Preliminary Activities

The scoring process will begin with the Evaluation Committee after the essays have been written and the papers shuffled to create a random order. At this point, one of the committee members will assume the role

of Head Reader and the other two members the role of Table Leaders. The committee members will spend approximately one hour reading papers at random from the stack of essays, and they will select two papers from the ones they have read which best meet their personal criteria as fitting into six categories ranging from best (6) to worst (1). Eighteen papers in all will be identified in this phase, and these papers will become potential anchor papers for the scoring process. According to Myers (1980, p. 33), "a paper is called an anchor because it defines a scoring category and keeps a reading anchored or tied to a normative scale, the bottom score being for bad papers and the top score being for good papers."

After the potential anchors are selected, all 18 papers will be duplicated without scores, and the committee members will arrange the papers from highest to lowest according to their own judgments. They will then arrive at a consensus about which papers are the best examples of each category, and these papers will become the official anchors for use in scoring the rest of the papers. After the anchors are selected, the committee will write general descriptions of papers in each category. These descriptions are called a rubric, and the rubric, together with the anchor papers, will be used to guide the scoring.

After the anchors are identified and the rubric written, the committee will spend approximately one hour reading and scoring randomly selected papers. This process will serve as a test and a verification of the validity of the anchors and the rubric. If new anchors are needed or changes in the rubric are found necessary, adjustments will be made at this time. This process will also produce a number of papers with scores

in each category. These papers will be used later in training the readers.

Reader Training

The "readers" will be the English teachers at Mosley, and the Head Reader will be responsible for their training. The training will begin by asking the readers to rank and score unmarked copies of one set of anchor papers using the rubric. After this scoring is completed, a tally will be made of the number of readers assigning each paper to each category. If substantial disagreement occurs, time will be spent discussing the rubric and the papers. After the discussion, or immediately if the tally indicates agreement, the process will be repeated, with discussion as needed, until all of the readers feel comfortable with their understanding of the categories and the rubric. The training will probably take no more than two hours, and it is possible that it will take less time than that.

The Reading

After the readers are trained, the scoring will begin. The readers will be divided into two "tables" of six people each, with a Table Leader assigned to each table. Each reader will be given a stack of approximately 100 papers which have been randomly selected from all three grades and all course levels. These papers will be read and scored on the scale of 1 to 6 quickly. The only mark written on the papers will be the score, which will be written on the back of the paper in the middle. Scores will be given holistically, that is, on the basis of first impression of the overall quality without the type of analysis a teacher would ordinarily give to class assignments. Papers given a score of 6 will probably be very

well written and will probably have no errors or very few. Papers given a 1 will probably be poorly written and will probably have many errors. However, these characteristics and others will not be evaluated individually.

During the first reading, the Table Leaders will spend their time reading papers already scored by their table members. The purpose of this is to improve the reliability of the scoring process. If the Table Leader discovers that a reader is scoring papers too high or too low, the Table Leader will work with that person to help him or her establish more consistent scoring practices. In addition, readers will refer papers which are difficult to score to the Table Leader for scoring.

When the first reading is completed, the readers will be given a second stack of papers which have already been scored by another reader. The process of reading and scoring will be repeated for the second stack; however, the second score will be given without consulting the first score, and it will be written in the upper right-hand corner on the front of the page.

During the second reading, the Table Leader will check to see whether the two readers agree on the score. If the scores are identical or are no more than one point apart, the readers' scores will stand. If the scores are more than one point apart (for example, a 4 and a 2), the Table Leader will read the paper and raise or lower one of the scores.

After each paper has been read and scored twice and the Table Leaders have verified agreement in the two scores, both scores for each paper will be added together to obtain a summary score. These scores will range from 2 to 12, and all analyses and interpretations of the results will be made using these summary scores.

V. Analysis of the Results

Distribution of Scores

Authorities on the subject of holistic scoring echo Meyers' (1980, p. 44) comment that "if the sample is large enough, if the sample is from mixed classes, if the anchoring has been done correctly, and if the readers stick to the anchors, the distribution should be approximately bell-shaped." The student body of Mosley certainly meets the first two of Meyers' criteria, and every effort will be made to ensure that the third and fourth criteria will be met. Therefore, it is expected that the first evaluation and all succeeding ones will produce the so-called "normal" distribution of scores across all eleven scoring categories.

The expected distribution is crucial in understanding how the results should be interpreted and used. The summary scores are norm-referenced scores. This means that an individual student's score is an indication of how well that student writes compared to all the other students at Mosley, but it is not an indication of whether or not the student has "mastered" writing or has learned all he or she needs to know about composition.

Another crucial point to keep in mind is that the overall distribution of scores is in no way an indication of the quality of writing instruction at Mosley. It will be possible to infer judgments of quality from the analysis of the data, but this is not possible from the overall distribution of scores. The distribution must approximate the normal curve; otherwise, it is necessary to conclude that the evaluation was not conducted correctly.

Uses of the Results

The results of the writing evaluation can be extremely useful in making decisions about curriculum, instructional materials, placement of students, and assignment of personnel. Data for decision making will come from answers to the questions listed in section III of this document. Each questions will be discussed below.

1. Does improvement in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another across all course levels?

If a writing program is doing its intended job and students are really learning how to write, then there should be a noticable improvement in scores from one grade level to another. In other words, the average score of seniors should be better than the average score of juniors, and juniors should have an average score higher than the average score of sophomores. A comparison of average scores across grades should provide a good overall indication of whether a general trend toward improvement is occurring in the school.

2. Does improvement in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another within each course level?

The answer to this question will provide more precise information of the type obtain from the first question. It is possible that the answer to the first question will indicate little or no improvement between two grade levels, but the closer look at the data afforded by the second question may indicate that the problem is really limited to only one

course level. For example, juniors may show little or no improvement over sophomores, but a closer look may indicate that the problem lies with students in the average classes and that students in basic and accelerated classes are making steady progress.

3. Is there differentiation in writing ability among course levels at the same grade?

Theoretically, students are assigned to course levels (i.e., basic, average, and accelerated) on the basis of their ability to perform the work expected of them in English. If the assignments are made accurately, then it is expected that students in basic classes will have lower scores than those in average classes, and average-class students will have lower scores than students in accelerated classes. The answer to the third question will identify those students whose writing is significantly better or worse than most of the other students in their course level. This identification process will provide very valuable information for guidance purposes.

It must be noted that at present no baseline data exist regarding students' writing ability. This means that in the first year of the writing assessment program it will be impossible to detect growth for individual students over the previous year. However, in future years this type of growth measurement will be possible for students beyond their first year at Mosley.

VI. Required Resources

Everything has its price, and the assessment of writing ability is

no exception. However, compared to other types of standardized evaluation (such as standardized objective tests), writing assessment is relatively inexpensive and the results are substantially more useful.

Personnel

The greatest expense in the writing assessment system is the time of the readers. To ensure maximum reliability, the training of the readers and the scoring of the papers must occur on the same day in a group setting without distraction or interruption. The Bay County school calendar does not afford a regular work day when these requirements can be met, so the only alternative is to conduct the scoring session on a Saturday. This means, of course, that the readers must be paid for their time, and the compensation should be in accord with each reader's regular daily salary. In all likelihood, the entire task can be completed in a single day, but budgetary provisions should be made for additional time if necessary.

Other Resources

In addition to readers' salaries, other resources will be needed to conduct the assessment. These other resources include index cards, the cost of printing directions for students and teachers, and other miscellaneous office supplies.

Estimated Budget

Personnel (16 readers x $90/day avg. x 1½ days)	$ 2,160.00
Other resources	340.00
	$ 2,500.00

This budget amounts to an approximate per student cost of $1.79.

Part Two: The Results

The plan for the Writing Assessment program described in Part One of this report was implemented at Mosley High School. The results of the Writing Assessment are discussed in the following sections.

I. Collection of the Data

The Writing Assessment Committee--which consisted of Edward Deluzain serving as chair, Alan Comerford, and Judy McGuire--selected Wednesday, January 26, 1983, as Writing Day. Writing Day was the ninth school day of the second semester.

In order to standardize the procedures as much as possible, the Writing Assessment Committee drew up a set of directions for teachers and students to be followed on Writing Day. Both sets of directions are included in the appendix. The Committee developed the following statement to be used as a writing prompt.

> Many inventions have been good for the human race, and some have caused major changes in how we live. Write a composition in which you name one good invention and discuss why we are better off because of it.

Every student was asked to write on this topic during regularly assigned English class. Students who were taking more than one English course were asked to write during their first English class of the day, and they were not allowed to write a second time.

Comments of teachers, as well as the actual written products, indicated that students took the task seriously. The topic was apparently comprehensible and accessible.

II. The Population

A total of 1,112 usable pieces of writing were collected on Writing Day. The total student population of Mosley High School is approximately 1,380 students. Approximately 100 students participate full time in a program of Exceptional Student Education (e.g., Deaf Education, Emotionally Handicapped, Educable Mentally Handicapped, etc.), and their writing was not included in the Writing Assessment unless they happened to be mainstreamed for English. In addition, approximately thirty students take Business English, which is taught in the Business Department, and their writing was also not included.

Approximately 140 eligible students did not participate in the Writing Assessment. Approximately fifteen of these students were away from school on Writing Day for the district-wide program for gifted students. The remaining 125 students were absent from school for a variety of routine reasons. The original plan was to allow these students to write on a make-up day, but this aspect of the plan was not followed.

III. The Scoring

The Writing Committee members were given release time on February 10, 1983, in order to select anchor papers and to develop a rubric for the holistic scoring procedure.

The holistic scoring procedure was conducted on Saturday, February 26, 1983. Teachers were paid at the contractual rate of pay for out-of-school work days ($40.00), and fifteen teachers participated. This number included twelve English teachers from Mosley and three from Mowat Junior High. The teachers who participated in the scoring were as follows:

Mosley High School

Edward Deluzain, Head Reader

Alan Comerford, Table Leader

Judy McGuire, Table Leader

Leslie Medlock

Anna Jones

Sally Redfern

Pam Owen

Marge Cosby

Alice Colvin

Karen Bassett

Beth Tesch

Vivian Juarez

Mowat Junior High School

Gloria Pipkin

Dorothea Rosof

Pam Kinison

The scoring session began with a two-hour training period using anchor papers and the scoring rubric. Substantial agreement was achieved among the teachers during the training period. The papers were then scored according to the procedure described in Part One of this report.

IV. The Results

Each paper received a summary score within the range of 2 to 12. Since these were norm-referenced scores, and since the population of Mosley High School constitutes a random sample of students within the normal range of intelligence, it is reasonable to expect the Writing Assessment scores to approximate the normal distribution. As Table 1 illustrates, the distribution of scores was very close to the normal distribution.

Table 1

Distribution of Scores for Total Population

Scores										
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
68	62	126	169	201	196	115	74	49	28	24

As Table 2 indicates, the distribution of scores within each grade also approximates the normal distribution. This confirms the fact that the

Table 2

Distribution of Scores by Grade

Grade	Scores										
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
10	32	35	55	76	73	64	28	17	14	9	8
11	22	16	42	48	67	70	45	31	15	9	10
12	14	11	29	45	61	62	42	26	20	10	6

scoring procedures were followed correctly.

The mean score for the entire school was 6.223. This mean is somewhat lower than the theoretical mean of 7.000. This is probably attributable in part to two factors. First, the teachers who did the scoring were new to the process of holistic scoring. In borderline cases they probably opted to assign the lower of the two scores under consideration to avoid the possibility of arbitrarily inflating the scores. Second, approximately fifteen of the brightest students were away from school on Writing Day attending the district-wide program for the gifted. In all likelihood, their scores would have raised the school mean somewhat.

In planning the Writing Assessment, a series of questions was prepared to serve as the objectives of the program. These questions, plus one additional question, will be considered in the following pages.

Question One: Does improvement in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another across all course levels?

The Writing Assessment data indicate that grade-level means increase steadily across the three grade levels in the school (Table 3).

Table 3

Means by Grade

Grades		
10	11	12
5.759	6.400	6.607

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the data and yielded an F-ratio significant at the .01 level. The Honestly-Significant-Difference (HSD) method was employed to identify significant differences among the means at the .01 level. The results of this test indicated that the means for both the junior and senior classes are significantly higher than the mean of the sophomore class, but the mean of the seniors is not significantly higher than the mean of the juniors.

It is possible, therefore, to conclude that students at Mosley High School, on the average, experience significant improvement in their writing ability from the time they enter the program to the time they leave. Furthermore, even though the improvement is not statistically significant each year, the improvement is steady.

Question Two: Does improvment in overall writing ability occur from one grade level to another within each course level?

Question Three: Is there differentiation in writing ability among course levels at the same grade?

Questions two and three can both be answered from the data in Table 4. Mosley High School employs a three-level tracking system in English, and students are assigned to the tracks on the basis of ability. It is expected that there would be substantial differences in the means across these thr-e ability levels at each grade. Indeed, the data bear this out at the .01 level. At all three grades, the means of the regular track students are significantly higher than the means of the basic track student, and the means of the accelerated track students are higher

Table 4

Means by Grade by Course Level

Level	Grade 10	11	12
Basic	3.380	3.750	4.433
Reg.	5.388	6.204	6.224
Acc.	8.252	8.446	8.444

than the means of the regular track students (ANOVA and HSD). Thus, the answer to question three is an unequivocal "yes."

If improvement in writing occurs throughout the curriculum, it is expected that differences in mean scores would be observed across grade levels within each of the tracks. This does indeed occur within the basic and regular tracks between the sophomore and senior years, but this is not true of accelerated students. The ANOVA and HSD revealed the significant differences summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Significant Differences of Means

By Grade by Course Level

Level	Grade 12 11	11 10	12 10
Basic	Sig. at .05	Not sig.	Sig. at .01
Reg.	Not sig.	Sig. at .05	Sig. at .05
Acc.	Not sig.	Not sig.	Not sig.

As the data in Table 5 indicate, basic track students show the greatest improvement from tenth to twelfth grade, and regular track students show the next greatest amount of improvement. Accelerated students, on the other hand, show no improvement which is statistically significant during their three years of high school. In fact, when the groups are compared in terms of the number of standard deviations above or below grade means (as they are in Table 6), the accelerated

Table 6

Comparison by Grade by Course Level

In Terms of Standard Deviations from Grade Means

	Grade		
	10	11	12
Grade Mean	5.759	6.400	6.607
Grade S.D.	2.299	2.342	2.252
S.D. from Grade Mean			
Basic	-1.03	-1.13	-0.97
Reg.	-0.16	-0.08	-0.17
Acc.	+1.08	+0.87	+0.81

students show an actual decline in performance relative to all of the students in their respective grades. In other words, accelerated seniors did relatively less well compared to all seniors than accelerated juniors compared to all juniors, and accelerated juniors did poorer compared to all juniors than accelerated sophomores did compared to all sophomores.

This failure of accelerated students to maintain a continuous growth rate is, of course, a matter of serious concern. A number of reasons may possibly have caused the phenomenon. Two of these reasons were studied in some detail, but neither study yielded plausible explanations.

The first possible reason was a significant difference in the overall academic ability of the students in each group. In order to test this hypothesis, a random sample of students was drawn from the accelerated classes at each grade (N's = 24, 24, and 26, respectively for 10th, 11th, and 12th grades), and their total battery percentiles (or total language percentiles, in a few cases) on the California Achievement Test were compared with ANOVA and the Scheffe Multiple Range Test. The mean for sophomores ($\overline{X}$ = 92.67) was significantly higher at the .05 level than the mean for juniors ($\overline{X}$ = 87.08) but not for seniors ($\overline{X}$ = 90.42). Likewise, the mean for seniors was not significantly higher than the mean for juniors. The advantage in academic ability of the sophomores may account for their relative superiority with respect to all sophomores, but it does not account for the performance of the accelerated juniors and seniors in relationship to their classes.

A second possible reason was a major difference in the amount of instruction in writing the accelerated students received compared to other groups. As part of a district-wide curriculum mapping project, teachers were asked to report an estimate of the number of class periods they spent on direct instruction in composition (exclusive of grammar, usage, mechanics, etc.) during the first semester. The results of this survey are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Mean Number of Class Periods

Spent in Direct Instruction in Writing

Grades	Course Levels		
	Basic	Regular	Accelerated
10	11.25	23.90	27.50
11	24.50	23.17	28.80
12	20.00	30.00	25.00

As the data in Table 7 show, accelerated students received approximately the same amount of instruction in all three grades. Also, except for regular-track seniors, the accelerated students received more instruction in writing than any other group. In one case--that of seniors in Advanced Placement English--the teacher reported spending only seven class periods on writing instruction, yet this group of students had a mean Writing Assessment score of 10.312, which is 1.65 standard deviations above the mean for all seniors. Thus, the time-on-task study sheds no light on the reason for the relatively poor performance of the accelerated students.

One problem which may contribute to the apparent regression in rate of improvement of the accelerated students is the lack of curriculum goals, textbooks, materials, and teaching methods which clearly differentiate between regular-track and accelerated-track courses. During the first semester of the 1982-83 school year, the Mosley English teachers

developed course outlines for the regular-track writing courses, but special course outlines for the accelerated track were not written. Likewise, the same textbooks (i.e., Warriner's English Grammar and Composition) are used as the rhetoric text in both the regular and accelerated tracks. The assumption among the faculty is that the regular and accelerated courses differ in pacing and in stringency of standards, but these differences are highly subjective and open to vast differences in interpretation by teachers. Since it is fairly well established that students tend to perform in terms of the expectations set for them by their teachers, it is possible that the accelerated students have not been challenged sufficiently to maintain a consistent growth rate in writing.

If this is in fact the case, then the situation at Mosley is really no different from the situation of other advanced students in the state and nation. The report issued by the Governor's Commission on Secondary Schools for the State of Florida in January, 1983, calls attention to the dearth of challenging materials for bright students (pp. 9 - 11). This lack of materials, coupled with the relatively high level of skills the accelerated students have before they start any given course of instruction, probably creates a false sense of improvement in the minds of students and teachers alike.

Whatever the reason may be, the results of the Mosley Writing Assessment clearly dispute the common wisdom that the brightest students learn despite the curricula and instruction they are given.

In addition to the three questions stated in the Writing Assessment Plan, an additional set of analyses were performed on the data. These analyses were designed to answer the following question:

Do students who take a literature course during the first semester do as well in writing as students who take a writing course during the first semester?

At Mosley High School, each student is required to take a full year of English all three years. Roughly half of the students take a literature course during the first semester and half take writing. The Jack Gordon Writing Skills Enhancement Act of 1982 requires that every student in grades 11 and 12 receive instruction in writing and produce at least one piece of writing each week. Thus, in the literature courses, writing is by no means neglected. Likewise, some literature is taught in writing courses as part of the prewriting stage of the rhetorical process.

Means were calculated by course type for each grade and course level (i.e., accelerated, regular, and basic). These means are tabulated in Table 8. It should be noted that students in courses labelled "Lit" in the table were taking literature at the time of the Writing Assessment. Thus, these students had just completed a semester course in writing when the data were collected.

Table 8

Means for Type of Course by Grade and Course Level

Grade	AP	Acc Lit	Acc Writ	Reg Lit	Reg Writ	Basic Lit	Basic Writ
10	XXXXXX	8.565	8.000	5.386	5.390	3.361	3.400
11	XXXXXX	8.730	8.095	6.118	6.299	3.260	4.090
12	10.312	7.815	8.311	6.103	6.319	4.468	4.380

Before beginning the analyses, it was hypothesized that students in literature courses during the second semester would have higher mean scores than students in writing courses second semester. Of the nine possible comparison pairs (excluding AP students), this was true in only three cases: accelerated sophomores, accelerated juniors, and basic seniors. In the remaining six cases, the mean scores of students who were taking writing second semester (hence, those who had just finished a literature course) were higher.

The ANOVA and HSD test were performed for each grade, and the only statistically significant difference was observed (at the .05 level) for basic-track juniors. In the case of this group, those who had literature first semester had a mean Writing Assessment score that was significantly higher than those who took writing first semester.

These results are quite alarming. The English curriculum is based on the premise that students learn more about writing in writing courses and more about literature in literature course than vice versa. The failure of the students who had just finished a writing course to score higher than those who had just finished a literature course (and, indeed, in most cases to do even as well as students who just finished a literature course) raises the question of the efficacy and desirability of maintaining the writing-literature course dichotomy.

As with the analysis of the data for accelerated students, a number of factors influenced the results. Two quantifiable factors--i.e., academic ability and time-on-task--were studied for the entire school to determine whether students who had literature first semester had any distinct advantages over those who had writing first semester.

A proportional random sample was drawn for each of the eighteen subgroups of students and total battery percentiles on the California Achievement Test were obtained from permanent records for each student in the sample. The means for the subgroups are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

Means of CAT Total Battery Percentiles

By Course Type, Grade, and Course Level

Grade	Acc Lit	Acc Writ	Reg Lit	Reg Writ	Bas Lit	Bas Writ
10	90.7	90.3	71.1	65.7	45.0	43.2
11	86.8	79.3	53.8	54.6	39.3	42.0
12	86.9	85.5	56.9	66.5	29.7	27.8

The ANOVA and HSD test were performed for the means in Table 9, but no significant differences were observed. However, in two thirds of the cases (i.e., accelerated sophomores, accelerated juniors, accelerated seniors, regular sophomores, basic sophomores, and basic seniors) the students who had writing first semester had a slight advantage over their counterparts who had literature first semester. As pointed out above, in three of these six comparison groups the students who had writing first semester had higher mean scores on the Writing Assessment than their counterparts who had literature first semester. Thus, in the case of three groups--accelerated seniors, regular sophomores, and basic sophomores--the first semester writing students had the advantage of greater academic ability and a formal course in writing, but

they still scored lower on the Writing Assessment than their counterparts in literature first semester.

Despite the fact that significant differences in academic ability apparently cannot be blamed for differences in performance on the Writing Assessment, there is a strong positive relationship between ability and Writing Assessment scores. The Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation was calculated using mean CAT percentiles and mean Writing Assessment percentiles. This coefficient was found to be .91.

The second quantifiable factor--i.e., time-on-task--was studied from data collected for the district-wide curriculum mapping project. The data in Table 10 show estimated amounts of time in number of class periods spent in direct instruction in composition.

Table 10

Mean Number of Class Periods Spent on Composition Instruction

Grade	Acc Lit	Acc Writ	Reg Lit	Reg Writ	Bas Lit	Bas Writ
10	10	45	11	37	7	16
11	22	33	7	40	24	25
12	30	20	30	30	24	18

There was considerable variation in the amount of time spent on direct composition instruction. The Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation for time-on-task and Writing Assessment scores was .35. This is relatively low, and it tends to contradict Squire's (1982)

assertion that time-on-task is a significant factor in improving performance in writing. Part of the difficulty lies in the data themselves. Teachers were asked to estimate the number of periods they spent in composition instruction. Some of the figures probably include periods which were spent on in-class writing assignments during which no instruction was given. Other figures probably represent only periods spent on teacher-directed activities.

From the existing data, it is not possible to verify reasons why students who had writing first semester did not achieve higher scores on the Writing Assessment than students who had literature first semester. However, their performance tends to support the belief held in some quarters that students make the greatest progress in integrated language arts courses. The literature courses, as they are taught at Mosley, focus on reading and interpreting imaginative literature. Ordinarily, literary works are read individually by students and then discussed in class. The teacher and textbook generally provide background about the author, literary period, characteristics of the genre, vocabulary, etc., and the weekly writing assignment is given as a culminating activity. Some literature teachers ask students to write a rough draft of essays and to spend class time revising and editing the drafts. In effect, the entire course follows the various stages of the writing process, with reading, background lectures, and discussion serving as the prewriting stage.

In the writing courses, however, the focus is different. In most cases, teachers present information about an aspect of writing (e.g., unity, coherence, paragraph development, the use of transitional devices, etc.), and students are asked to write a composition exemplifying the

particular aspect under discussion. Topic selection and prewriting activities related to the content of the topic are generally given little or no attention in class because of time limitations. Furthermore, considerable time is spent on the study of grammar and the mechanical conventions of writing, and the time spent in these activities obviously cannot be spent discussing ideas.

One aspect of writing instruction frequently debated among teachers of writing has to do with the relative importance of knowledge of content versus knowledge of the process of writing. Clearly aspects of both positions are necessary to produce skilled writers, but the data from the Writing Assessment seem to support the notion that an emphasis on content, with some attention to the process, does more to improve writing performance than an emphasis on the process with only minimal attention to content.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the rusults of the Writing Assessment conducted at Mosley High School in January, 1983, the following conclusions seem warranted.

1. Students at Mosley High School, on the average, improve in their writing ability every year, and the improvement is statistically significant over the three years they are in high school.
2. There is a clear differentiation in the writing ability of students in the three ability-based tracks employed at Mosley High School. At every grade level, the most advanced students (accelerated track) write significantly better than

the average students (regular track), and the average students write significantly better than less able students (basic track).

3. Students in the regular and basic tracks, on the average, experience improvement which is statistically significant between their sophomore and senior years.
4. Students in the accelerated track do not, on the average, experience improvement in writing great enough to be statistically significant. Furthermore, they appear, on the average, to show a decline in the rate of improvement in writing between their sophomore and senior years.
5. Students who finished a semester course in writing immediately before the Writing Assessment did no better than students who finished a semester course in literature immediately before the Writing Assessment.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered.

1. That increased attention be given to the writing curriculum for accelerated-track students. This attention should focus on the following areas:
   a. setting goals which clearly differentiate accelerated-track courses from regular-track courses;
   b. selecting textbooks, other materials, and teaching methods which facilitate the accomplishment of these goals;
   c. establishing expectations which challenge accelerated students and force them to strive for excellence.

2. That experimentation be carried out to determine the optimum mixture of curriculum components (e.g., literature, grammar and mechanics, vocabulary, composition, etc.). Experiments could take the form of creating experimental year-long classes, increasing the time spent on prewriting activities in writing classes, eliminating grammar study, etc.

VI. References

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Appendix A

Mosley High School
Department of Language Arts

Writing Assessment: Directions for Teachers

1. Each student should write only one Writing Assessment composition. Students who are taking more than one English course should write during their first English class of the day

2. Every student should have a pen and lined looseleaf, and they should use these for the composition. Students may not use dictionaries.

3. Pass out the cards the students filled out on Tuesday. Tell them to make sure they copy the number from the card onto their pages. Make sure they understant that their names are not to appear on their compositions. Also, emphasize accuracy in copying the number from the card.

4. Pass out the assignment sheets, and read the assignment orally as students follow along. You may answer questions to clarify the assignment, but do not answer questions or give hints about how to write the assignment. Please tell the students not to write on the assignment sheets.

5. When the students start working, circulate around the room to pick up the cards. As you do this, check to make sure that the cards are complete and accurate, that the students have copied their assessment number accurately in the upper right hand corner, and that their names do not appear on their papers.

6. If the student uses more than one sheet of looseleaf, all sheets should be stapled together in the right order, and every sheet should have the assessment number in the upper righthand corner. Also, the pages should be numbered at the top of the page in the center.

7. At fifteen minutes before the end of the period, tell students that they have fifteen minutes in which to finish their work. Emphasize that they will not be allowed to take more time to finish the assignment outside of that class period.

8. Allow students to turn in their papers to you as they finish. When they turn them in, make sure the assessment number is on every page and that the pages are numbered and in the right order.

9. Make sure you collect all of the assignment sheets from the students. There are not enough of these sheets for each student to have one to keep. You will have to use the same sheets in all of your classes throughout the day.

Appendix B

Mosley High School
Department of Language Arts

Writing Assessment: Directions to Students

You are going to write a composition during this class period on the topic given below. You will have the whole class period to write if you need it, but you must be ready to turn in your paper at the end of class. Your paper will be scored, and the results will be given back to you before the end of the school year. Your score on this composition will not count as part of your grade in English; however, your score will be kept on file at school to show the progress you make in writing. Please follow these directions in writing your composition.

1. DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON ANY OF YOUR PAGES. Instead, write the number from your index card in the upper right-hand corner of each page. We are using numbers instead of names so that the papers can be scored anonymously.

2. Write on looseleaf paper. Please do not use paper torn from a notebook. Do not use a coversheet.

3. Write in ink.

4. Skip lines and write only on the front side of each page.

5. Number your pages in the center of the top of the page. Staple all pages together in the right order.

TOPIC

Many inventions have been good for the human race, and some have caused major changes in how we live. Write a composition in which you name one good invention and discuss why we are better off because of it.